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ABSTRACT

Examined in the overview of competency based teacher education (CBTE) are the historical context in which CBTE developed, definitions and models of CBTE, and similarities with principles of individualized instruction for children. Listed are observations on CBTE's advantages (such as the emphasis on accountability, increased student involvement and learning efficiency, and opportunities for matching faculty strengths with teaching tasks) as well as disadvantages (including the tendency to become too specific in objectives and the time consuming process of developing a competency based program). It is suggested that CBTE is culturally unbiased and therefore appropriate for culturally different populations. (CL)

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COMPETENCY BASED TEACHER EDUCATION:
AN OVERVIEW

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There is always a temptation when placed in the position of presenting a paper which will be subjected to comment by selected colleagues to focus on their assumed observations. Our intent in this session is to explore the implications of Competency Based Teacher Education for culturally different learners. I will resist that temptation and limit my presentation to providing an overview of CBTE as a framework for their responses.

During the past ten years CBTE has emerged from a vaguely described set of principles through a period of innovation to a status which, at best, can be referred to as a generalized practice based more on the power of logic than on the empirism of research. This is not intended as a negative statement. Few changes in education have occurred within such a short time frame or have attracted such attention. The literature is extant with conference summaries, project reports, commissioned studies, research abstracts, conceptual papers, and books or readings on the design and general application of Competency Based Teacher Education programming. With such a contemporary base of information on a practice, any discussion relating to an overview of the practice risks becoming a redundant exercise. My experience in preparing for this presentation confirms this speculation. In contrasting the substantive views reflected in the literature today with those of the late 1960's, one can argue that few changes have occurred conceptually in the structuring of CBTE programming. Certainly refinements have been made, our vocabulary is more complete, the

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cumulated evidence of effectiveness is much more visible and definitive. But the basic principles remain central and relatively unchanged. What has changed is the magnitude of teacher trainers with experience in implementing the approach and a universe of individuals who are products of the innovation turned practice.

The perspectives held today are no longer speculative. They now stem from experience. Gone are the subjective outbursts of defensive criticisms which, while difficult to deal with, were lacking foundation. Criticism continues, but today it centers on issues which even proponents acknowledge are legitimate concerns though not necessarily insurmountable. We have gained a number of observations which are supported by anecdotal and in many cases data-related evidence. In most cases these observations have been transformed into questions which are explorable and researchable. As a prerequisite to discussing these observations, it is necessary to comment on the context in which Competency Based Teacher Education has emerged and to bring into focus the principles common to CBTE.

Historical Context

The call for change in teacher education did not occur as the result of a single or small collection of events. It emerged out of a set of conditions which historically has been perpetuated by generations of teacher educators, including our contemporaries. The image of teacher education by the 1950's had become one of being non-responsive to the demands of consumers for relevance and quality control. The claims of critics that teachers were being trained in isolation from the realities of child centered environments were more truth than fiction. It was apparent that if the climate and perceptions did not change that the

university role in teacher training would not only be challenged but would likely be altered considerably. It was inevitable that the logic of field based training and performance or competency based teacher education would be endorsed once conceptualized and introduced in the form of a supportable research and demonstration enterprise.

It would be unfair and clearly simplistic to suggest that the stable conditions of teacher training during the 40's and 50's resulted from the momentum of prior generations of teacher educators. If we are objective about our own behavior and the setting of the university, it is clear that the primary contributors of those elements of teacher education which became the targets of criticism, have been those responsible for teacher training and not the apathy of teacher trainees or administrators of Schools of Education. These same behaviors remain in many ways characteristic of a sizeable proportion of teacher educators today, i.e.:

- control of the curriculum by controlling our courses
- resisting the specifying of what we teach
- using academic freedom as a ploy to protect our role
inclusive of our time
- creating the image that as university professors we are not
mere trainers of teachers but creators of new knowledge
and truths.

Admittedly, progress has been made during the past ten years in changing the image of teacher training programs, but the fact that a major pool of teacher educators remains unchanged in their behavior and their views attests to the resistance of the cycle to change.

These comments are not intended to create a strawman but rather are presented as part of those conditions which must be considered in structuring an overview of Competency Based Teacher Education today.

Defining Competency Based Education

In offering a definition of CBTE as part of an overview, one can become perplexed by the options available. There is no end to the examples of models and schemata used to communicate definitions and/or descriptions of competency based programs. In reviewing such examples and operational programs, it is apparent that in an attempt to ^{be} creative variance occurs.

I. Defining Competency Based Education - In spite of the variance which exists in the application of CBE programs there are elements which are common to most programs. These elements are equally appropriate to the teaching of teachers as to the teaching of children. The critical factor is not the learner but the design of the program. By this I am saying there are certain features which appear to be central to CBTE regardless of the target population. For this reason, I will comment on the common features rather than a particular model. These features can be classified as instructional and program related.

A. Instructional features.

1. Competencies are identified as specific skills and concepts.
2. The curriculum is structured around measurable statements.
3. Teaching activities are generally in modular form.
4. Each teaching activity is directly related to a specified behaviorally stated objective.
5. Inherent in each activity is an evaluation task designed to assess progress toward the objective.

6. The emphasis is as much on the entry skills as the exit skills. If a student demonstrates competence on a particular objective then he is not subjected to the instructional activity.
7. Learner feedback is central. The learner is informed of what is expected of him--instructional options available--and his level of performance.
8. Learner feedback is cumulative. The learner not only gets feedback on current activities but has access to information on his cumulative performance.
9. Learner specific. The resultant program is individually oriented rather than group oriented. The learner is allowed to progress at his own rate.
10. Considerable emphasis is given to independent study instructional options.

B. Program Features

1. Curriculum specified in extensive detail.
2. Curriculum highly sequenced - or at least capable of being sequenced.
3. Curriculum is clearly spelled out for purposes of examination.
4. Monitoring systems are maintained.
5. Grades are based on the capability of an individual in meeting specified criteria in contrast to comparing the progress of each individual against the performance of the group.

An implicit feature often overlooked is the analogous situation which exists between CBTE and the trend toward individualizing instruction for children. An examination of the two trends clarifies why public school personnel tend to be supportive of CBTE as a major step forward for teacher education. For example:

Parallel Principles of Competency Based Classroom Instruction and
Competency Based Teaching Training

Principles of
Good Classroom Instruction

1. Basic skill identification skills, information, concepts
2. Sequencing of curriculum content into developmental order
3. Task analysis to determine prerequisite skills and requirements for instruction against specified objectives
4. Developing units or other structured instructional activities
5. Delivering instruction; alternative, appropriate to specified objectives
6. Evaluating pupil progress through criterion measures
7. Reporting pupil progress to pupil and parent

Principles of Competency
Based Teaching Training

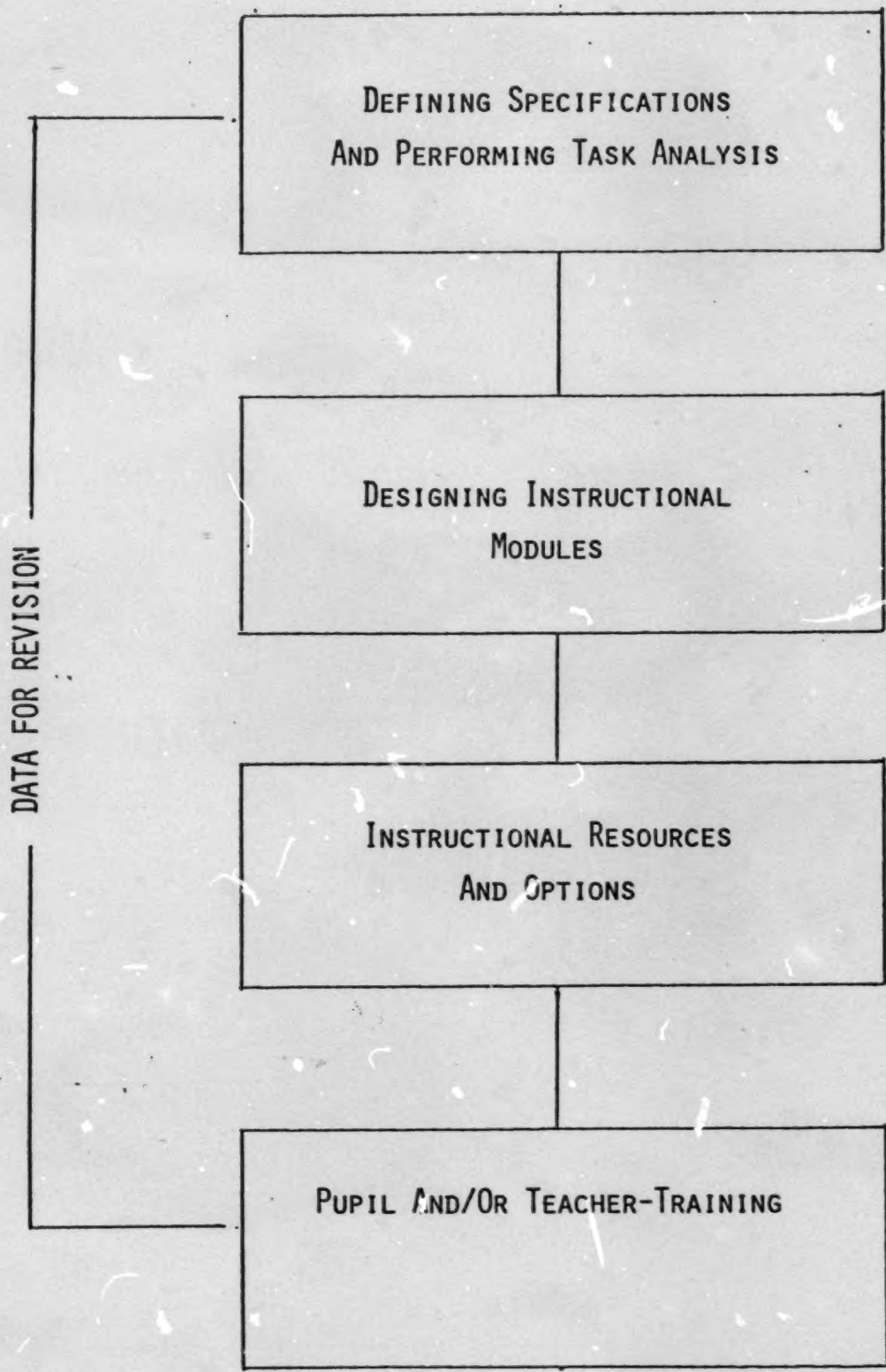
1. Competency identification
2. Competency organization
3. Specifications process reduce competencies into training components
4. Module development activities
5. Module management options alternative to traditional lecture model
6. Evaluating trainee competence through performance assessment
7. Providing feedback on performance to trainees

For purposes of summarizing my descriptive definition of Competency Based Teacher Education, I will share two very basic models. These models are not presented as substantive explication of the system but as a focal point for the subsequent responses of panel members.

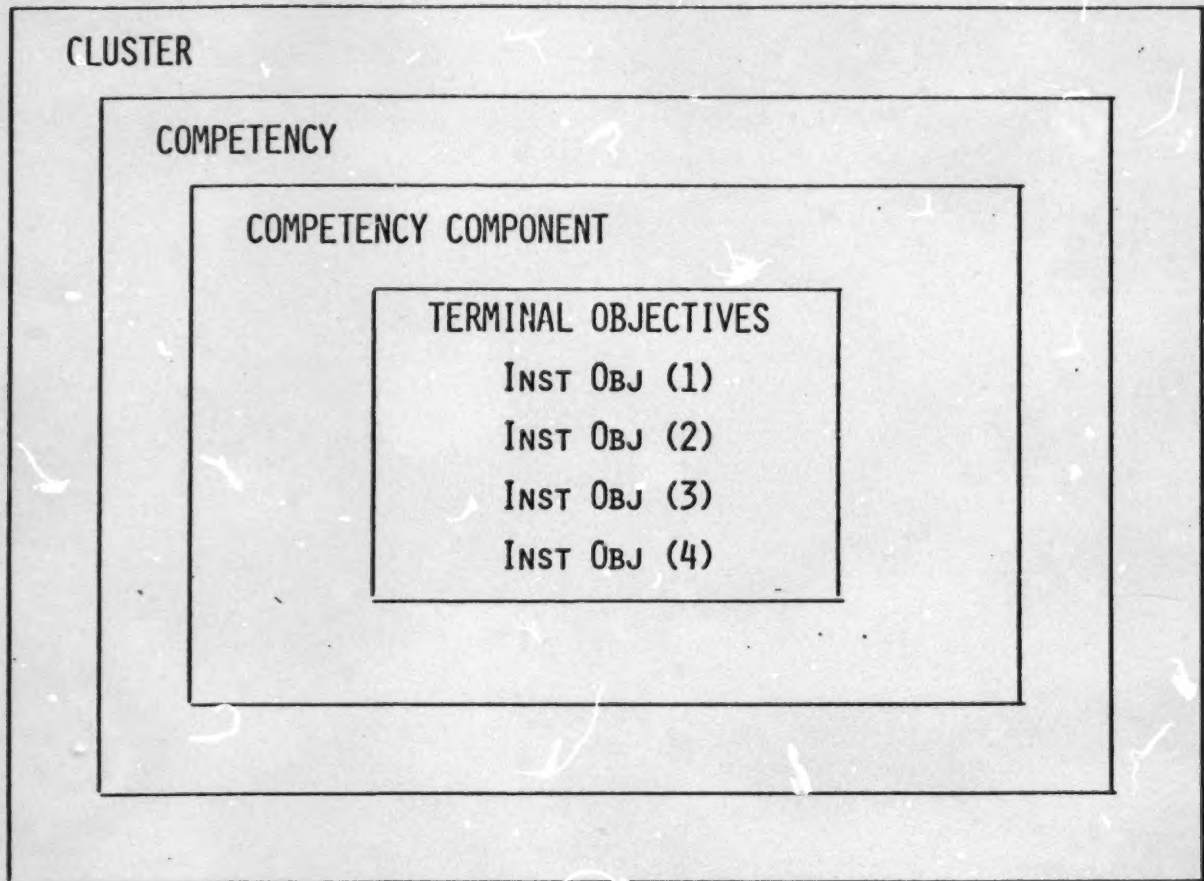
Transparency - CBTE Model

Transparency - Module Model

Transparency - Module Requirements



MODULE DESIGN



MODULE REQUIREMENTS

- STAND ALONE
IN TOTAL
IN PART
- ASSESS ENTRY AND EXIT BEHAVIORS
- INTERNALLY CONSISTANT
- CURRICULUM NOT TEACHER BASED
- PUPIL CHARACTERISTIC SPECIFIC
- UNDERSTANDABLE BY STUDENT
- COMPATIBLE WITH SYSTEM

Observations

Reference was made earlier in this presentation to the number of teacher trainers and teacher trainees who today can claim experience in performance based teacher training. It would be presumptuous on my part to suggest that I have complete access to their views. However, as a person who, for a period of time, was extensively involved in a CBTE project and as an individual with administrative responsibilities for a rather large teacher training program that employs many of the basic principles of CBTE, I have made it a point to search out the varied implications of CBTE for the preparation of Special Education personnel. I have classified these observations under advantages and disadvantages, recognizing fully that what I perceive as an advantage others may consider a disadvantage.

Advantages:

1. The commitment of financial and human resources to restructuring teacher education in order to be more accountable and to be more child-oriented in itself has been good for the profession. I believe this to be true even if CBTE proves to be ineffective as a whole. It has served to move us away from a set of program descriptors which are indefensible today.
2. The process of identifying competencies, organizing them, and of developing modules approximates the process of curriculum development. This is a major advantage. Teacher training programs should evolve from systematically developed curricula and not from the arbitrary organization of courses independently designed by faculty members.

3. The consequence of developing a CBTE program is that the training curriculum is detailed, related to presumed behavior changes in children/youth, conducive to evaluation, and capable of being monitored. Prior to the emergence of CBTE, this was a rare occurrence in teacher education.
4. Once operational, the features of CBTE allow for the program to be communicated to public school personnel. One of the problems historically encountered by teacher trainers has related to the inability to relate elements of the training curriculum to specific teaching skills required to change the behavior of child learners.
5. CBTE appropriately implemented leads to efficiency in the acquisition of skills on the part of teacher trainees. It also provides for more student involvement in program related decisions.
6. As a department chairman, one of the most significant advantages of CBTE is that it creates a set of circumstances which allows for the matching of professor talent with teaching tasks. In other words, it becomes feasible to have faculty members teaching from personal strengths. This has the effect of also creating what some perceive as a disadvantage in that it primarily precludes a faculty member from "gerrymandering" courses which they refine and perpetuate as their personal property.

Disadvantages:

Depending on your role and how specific you want to be, you can generate a large number of disadvantages. I will focus on those that I have observed in my own experience and in examining other programs. Most will be aimed at the program level.

1. In the process of identifying competencies and transforming them to behaviorally stated objectives or precise descriptive statements there is a tendency to generate too many. This is a result of becoming too specific. In some cases, particularly with children, such specificity is called for but in teacher education this should not be the case. Having examined several collections of competencies I am convinced that there is a tendency to be seduced by the strategy of task analysis. Not any teaching skill or body of information warrants such delineation.
2. Too much emphasis on evaluation. Some programs pre and post test every objective--to me, this is too much. You should be able to pre test on a hierarchy and one more applicational level. Otherwise, the student spends too much time in test situations. This applies to children as well as teacher trainees. Many meaningful teaching activities are also ineffectively used as evaluation tasks.
3. College students are not used to assuming responsibility for learning. Most modules tend to be individualized in nature. Students tire of this approach unless the instructor becomes actively involved.
4. Most management procedures are either too sophisticated for the task or grossly insufficient. Some of the computer approaches are sound but not necessary for small programs. It is important to be able to monitor each student's program, as well as groups of students.

There must be a method for assuring the student access to where he is at and where he is going without making the training program a slave of the system.

5. Professors are not experienced at the "nitty gritty" task of developing modules. They frequently resist such involvement. I am not convinced that any professor is capable of such production behavior nor am I convinced that such is essential.
6. The process of developing a competency based program is so time consuming that it cannot be effectively accomplished without substantial alterations of departmental priorities and the allocation of manpower to the task. It is probably best accomplished on a project basis. I would argue that departments must substantially develop their own program and that adoption is really not an alternative in CBTE. This obviously creates a dilemma.
7. Students have a tendency to pace themselves. The pace sometimes is related to the group with a norm being externally forced onto the attainment of criterion measures. Particularly where the modules activities are specific, it is difficult for the student to maintain a pace commensurate with his capability.
8. Grading can be problematic. If the activities are for very specific objectives, there is a false sense of progress. The student may be satisfying large numbers of objectives because of the minute nature of the tasks involved but is not moving forward at the same rate as a student working on half or less the number of objectives. There is also a debate among some on whether or not a teacher trainer/ a student would ever fail. In other words, some take the approach that if a person can't learn a particular

skill it is the instructor's responsibility to break it down further until you reach a point where the learner is successful. I find this very difficult to accept in teacher education. It has been my observation that grading practices become inflated when the program is primarily competency based.

9. The more objective you become the more freedom you lose as a professor - the claim of accountability makes students less tolerant of professors who elect to expand or elaborate on content which is part of a CBTE program. Students become conditioned to expect full advanced disclosure of expectations.
10. Not all professors teach best in a CBTE model nor does all content lend itself equally to competency specification or to a module format.
11. CBTE once operational can result in a false sense of security. Merely having specified competencies and developed modules does not necessarily mean you have an operational nor effective program.
12. Cost. While the costs are unquestionably high, the high costs are related to the initial development of the curriculum. The costs of maintaining the program will vary depending on how the program is organized. In teacher training the costs will likely remain high. In the classroom they should be comparable unless more extensive use is made of teacher aids.

Summary

If analyzed in its complete context, an overview of Competency Based Teacher Education must acknowledge the historical vulnerability of teacher education to arguments for change -- the powerful logic behind CBTE -- its face validity for public school consumers of teacher trainees and the level of change brought about by the CBTE movement. The widespread endorsement of CBTE by training programs, professional organizations, and licensing agencies speaks to the strength of the movement. An analysis of the literature and of our practice speaks to the deficiencies of the system. As precocious as the movement appears to be, it is immature and has not stood the test of time.

As we subject the principles of CBTE to a test of its application to culturally different populations, may I suggest a hypothesis.

"The principles of Competency Based Teacher Education are content free and culturally unbiased, i.e., the system applies to all content and to all population of learners."